



United States
Department of
Agriculture

Food and
Nutrition
Service

Mountain
Plains
Region

1244 Speer Boulevard
Denver, CO 80204

Reply to
Attn. of:

SP 94-C-34

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Subject:

Common Problems with Offer versus Serve in the National School Lunch Program

To:

STATE AGENCY DIRECTORS
(Special Nutrition Programs)

- Colorado ED, Iowa, Kansas, Missouri ED,
Montana OPI, Nebraska ED, North Dakota,
South Dakota, Utah, Wyoming ED

As a result of reviews in the Mountain Plains Region, we have identified problems with the implementation of the "Offer versus Serve" serving method. Some examples of the findings are:

- Meat/Meat Alternate, Vegetable and Bread being served and students only allowed a choice of milk or fruit.
- Meat/Meat Alternate, Bread and Milk being served and students only allowed to choose one food item from the Vegetable/Fruit group.
- Entree (e.g., Hot Dog and Bun) served on the plate, students picked up milk, proceeded to another area where they could select either a serving of fruit or a pudding pop.

Offer versus Serve requires all senior high schools participating in the National School Lunch Program to allow students the choice of declining up to two of the five food items that the school must offer. The school food authority or the school cannot decide which food items a student may refuse by requiring that certain food items be taken. The decision to decline one or two items, and which items to decline, rests solely with the student.

For schools below the senior high level, the school district makes the decision whether or not to implement Offer versus Serve. The school district also decides how many food items, not which food items, the students may decline. The school district could permit two items to be declined, or permit only one item to be declined. However, as in the senior high schools, only the student may decide which item (or items) to decline.

Let's look at some examples to determine if these meals are reimbursable under Offer versus Serve. Remember the first requirement: all five food items must be offered in proper serving sizes to all students. Please refer to memorandum SP 94-C-32 for "preplate" serving exceptions. For senior high schools and other schools which allow students to decline up to two food items, a reimbursable lunch must contain at least three of the five food items offered.

Example 1: Student is offered Salisbury Steak, mashed potatoes, mixed peas and carrots, a hot roll, and milk. If the student chooses the Salisbury Steak, a hot roll and milk, is this considered a reimbursable meal under Offer versus Serve? Yes, because the student declined two items and chose three: meat, bread and milk. If the student chooses mixed peas and carrots and Salisbury Steak, would this meal be reimbursable? No, because the student has chosen only two food items, one vegetable item and the meat, and declined the three other items offered. One additional item must be chosen in order to make the meal reimbursable.

Example 2: Student is offered a tuna fish sandwich, potato rounds, fresh vegetable sticks and milk. If the student selects a tuna sandwich, potato rounds and milk, is this considered a reimbursable meal under Offer versus Serve? Yes, because the student has chosen four of the offered food items: meat, bread, one vegetable and milk. If the student chose potato rounds, vegetable sticks and milk, would this be a reimbursable meal? Yes, because three food items were chosen: two vegetables and milk.

Example 3: Student is offered chicken soup, a grilled cheese sandwich, salad, an apple and milk. The full meat component has been split between the soup and the sandwich. If the student chooses the grilled cheese sandwich, salad and milk, would this be a reimbursable meal? Yes, three food items were selected, bread, one vegetable and milk. If the student chooses the chicken soup, an apple and salad, would this be a reimbursable meal? No, because the student has chosen only a complete serving of two items, the two vegetable/fruit items. In order for the student to select enough meat to count as one of the five food items, the student would have to take both the soup and the sandwich. However, as noted, the student may choose a reimbursable meal without choosing both the soup and the sandwich.

If a school district has implemented Offer versus Serve permitting students in school below the senior high level to decline one item only, the student would have to choose at least four food items in order for the meal to be claimed for reimbursement.

Always remember that the three or four items needed to form a reimbursable school lunch must be different food items. A second portion of milk or a second serving of a main dish cannot count toward meeting the number of items needed.

Education at all levels is the key to effective implementation of Offer versus Serve.

If you have any questions, please call our office.

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